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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001355

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR ETHAN GOLDRICH, DEPARTMENT PASS TO USTR WILLIAM CLATANOFF AND JASON BUNTIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2014

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SUBJECT: BAHRAINI CABINET APPROVES DRAFT FTA

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) On August 29 the Bahraini Cabinet approved the current draft of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States. Press reports on the Council's decision followed a familiar refrain, highlighting the FTA's economic benefits, particularly the potential for job creation, as well as duty-free access to the U.S. market for goods produced or "substantially transformed" in Bahrain, including textiles and 96 percent of agricultural and manufactured goods. The Cabinet also formally delegated authority to the Minister of Finance and National Economy Abdullah Saif to sign the agreement.

2. (C) During the Ambassador's August 30 call on Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar (septel), Ghaffar confirmed Minister Saif will visit Washington in mid-September to sign the FTA with USTR Zoellick. The Bahraini Embassy in Washington now has an economic officer, Dr. Nasser Belooshi, to work on FTA implementation and identify ways that Bahrain can benefit from the FTA. The GOB wants to encourage development of the private sector.

3. (C) Comment: While the Cabinet's approval was expected, the GOB has used its seal of approval to again send a strong message that the FTA offers real opportunities and tangible benefits to Bahrainis. Expectations are high and as the signing nears the Embassy will continue to work closely with GOB officials and Washington agencies on implementation strategies.
MONROE